

The Washi

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Negative Thinking *by Philpot*

The State Department has chosen to construe Secretary General U Thant's informal suggestion that the nuclear powers "meet" in 1965 as a mere proposal that they have a "dialogue" through existing channels of diplomacy. The American response has a negative ring. It may be quite true that the Chinese have not exhibited any inclination to embrace existing opportunities for conferring on the limitation of thermonuclear arms or the suspension of testing. It is equally certain that there are channels through which they can make overtures at any time, if they have any new or constructive proposals for checking the proliferation of nuclear arms.

The official American response, by State Department Press Officer Robert J. McCloskey, rightly pointed this out but went on to state that the United States does not envisage any formal five-power conference which would include Red China, nor its participation in the U.N.-sponsored Geneva disarmament conference which has been going on since March, 1962. Yet, it is conceded that ultimately any meaningful disarmament negotiations must include China. The net effect of all this is to place the United States, which has every reason to take an affirmative stand, in a curiously negative position.

The bellicosity and truculence of Red Chinese statements since the explosion of their nuclear device has irritated and annoyed peace-loving people throughout the world. Instead of doing our best to perpetuate and stimulate this annoyance, this country has spoken and acted in a way that could well diminish world resentment of China. This country could have kept world attention directed on China by handling its own words and acts with an eye to this world situation.

Expression by the Government of the United

States of a willingness to participate in a world conference of nuclear powers in 1965 would have been more in line with our real purposes and interests. And it would have kept the attention of the world focused on the power that now most threatens the world with the renewed hazards of atmospheric testing and nuclear proliferation. That power is Red China. We might better have given U Thant's proposal the widest and broadest construction. It would clarify the world crisis to compel the Red Chinese to refuse such a conference or to drag them into one, kicking and protesting. It is the French and the Chinese who face embarrassment at such a meeting. It is difficult to understand why we help them escape that embarrassment.

The underground explosion at Mississippi also seems ill-timed. Why in the world should this country wish to take the mind of the world off the Chinese blast? There may be some instant need for this experiment at this particular time but it has not been disclosed. One is left to wonder if a previously planned operation did not go forward in sublime indifference to the international public affairs consequence of its timing. We seemed to have a positively masochistic impulse to get into the box of the accused along with Red China. The timing was curiously awkward. It would be interesting to know if any thought was given to this aspect of the problem. If there was no review of this phase of the matter, it is a sad commentary on the coordination of policy. And it suggests the urgent need for some officer at the White House level, sufficiently powerful to compel a review of planned operations that interfere with our diplomatic objectives.

The months and years immediately ahead may offer the very last chance to confine the proliferation of thermonuclear weapons and the very final opportunity to prevent the revival of atmospheric testing and to prevent the continuation of all testing. The opportunity will be lost if it is confronted with negative attitudes toward new openings and with the blind pursuit of previously planned arrangements with no regard for consequences.